Veterans Review and Appeal Board

2015–16

Report on Plans and Priorities

The Honourable Erin O'Toole, P.C., C.D., M.P.
Minister of Veterans Affairs

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as represented by the Minister of Veterans Affairs, 2015

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This document is available in alternative formats upon request.

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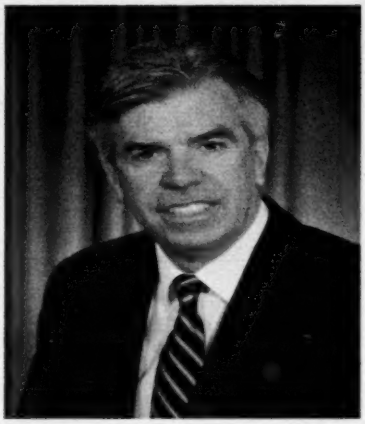
Chair's Message



I am pleased to present the 2015-16 Report on Plans and Priorities for the Veterans Review and Appeal Board.

The Board's mission is to provide timely, respectful hearings and fair, plain-language decisions to Veterans, Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) and Royal Canadian Mounted Police (RCMP) members, and their families who turn to the Board for redress of their disability benefits decisions. This mission statement is important to us: it is at the heart of everything we do.

In my six years as Chairman, I am proud to have overseen a number of positive initiatives that will continue to benefit applicants far into the future. In particular, the Board has:

- enhanced its systems for tracking applications and refined its scheduling practices to hear Veterans' cases at the earliest opportunity;
- implemented decision writing improvements for decisions that more clearly convey the reasons for the ruling;
- integrated business process redesign practices into our day-to-day operations to "work smarter" and reduce red tape; and
- increased engagement with stakeholders and applicants to guide program improvements.

Thanks to these and other accomplishments, the Board is in an excellent position to achieve its priorities in 2015-16. To better serve applicants, we will:

- continue to provide opportunities for timely hearings and decisions;
- further streamline and enhance our operations;
- improve the reach and impact of our communications; and
- strengthen our management practices.

It has been a true honour and a privilege to serve Veterans, CAF and RCMP members, and their families in my capacity as Chair of the Board. I have no doubt that they will continue to be well-served in 2015-16 and beyond through the dedication of Board staff and members.

John D. Larlee
Chair, Veterans Review and Appeal Board

Section I: Organizational Expenditure Overview

Organizational Profile

Appropriate Minister: The Honourable Erin O'Toole, P.C., C.D., M.P.

Institutional Head: John D. Larlee

Ministerial Portfolio: Veterans Affairs

Enabling Instruments: *Veterans Review and Appeal Board Act*[ii]; *Veterans Review and Appeal Board Regulations*[iii].

Year of Incorporation / Commencement: 1995

Other: Applications for review and appeal can be made to the Board under the following legislation:

- *Pension Act*[iv];
- *Canadian Forces Members and Veterans Re-establishment and Compensation Act – Part 3*[v] (New Veterans Charter);
- *War Veterans Allowance Act*[vi];
- *Royal Canadian Mounted Police Pension Continuation Act*[vii]; and
- *Royal Canadian Mounted Police Superannuation Act*[viii].

The Board also adjudicates applications for compassionate awards made under section 34 of the *Veterans Review and Appeal Board Act*.

Organizational Context

Raison d'être

The Veterans Review and Appeal Board (the Board) is an independent, administrative tribunal created in 1995. The Board provides an appeal program for service-related disability decisions made by Veterans Affairs Canada. This program gives applicants two levels of redress for disability pension and disability award decisions and the final level of appeal for War Veterans Allowance claims.

The Board's objective is to ensure that Canada's traditional Veterans, Canadian Armed Forces members and Veterans, Royal Canadian Mounted Police applicants, qualified civilians and their families receive the disability pensions, disability awards and other benefits to which they are entitled under the law.

The responsible Minister for the Board is the Minister of Veterans Affairs.

Responsibilities

What does the Board do for ill and injured Veterans?

The Board offers two levels of redress for those who are dissatisfied with disability benefits decisions made by Veterans Affairs Canada (VAC, the Department). It operates at arm's-length from VAC to provide an independent appeal process. Learn more about the Board[ix].

Hearings

Hearings are conducted by Board Members, who are independent, impartial adjudicators. Their role is to decide whether the evidence meets the requirements of the legislation to award new or increased levels of disability benefits. They are not bound by previous decisions and will change them to benefit Veterans if there is relevant credible evidence to support the change. Learn more about Board Members[x].

Review hearings are conducted by panels of two Board Members. Veterans have the opportunity to give oral testimony and bring new evidence and witnesses in support of their case. Appeal hearings are conducted by panels of three Board Members who did not hear the case at review. The appeal hearing provides a further opportunity for applicants, through their representative, to submit new information and make arguments. All hearings are non-adversarial, which means no one argues against the Veteran. Learn more about the Board's hearings[xi].

What kind of cases does the Board hear?

Decisions appealed to the Board are frequently complex and challenging. Many applicants are satisfied with their departmental decisions and only about 10% come to the Board for an independent review. The top six medical conditions in applications are:

- back conditions
- knee conditions
- tinnitus
- neck conditions
- hearing loss
- post-traumatic stress disorder

Workload and Outcomes

The Board issues approximately 4,000 decisions annually, of which two-thirds are reviews and one-third are appeals. In 2013-14, the Board ruled favourably in approximately half of reviews and appeals awarding almost 2,100 applicants new or increased disability benefits. These favourability rates are due, in part, to the Board's ability to give applications a fresh review, receive new evidence and hear testimony from the Veteran and witnesses. Learn more about the Board's workload statistics[xii].

Strategic Outcome and Program Alignment Architecture

Strategic Outcome: An independent and fair appeal process for disability pension, award and allowance decisions made by Veterans Affairs Canada

Program: Review and Appeal

Internal Services

Organizational Priorities

Organizational Priorities

Priority	Type[1]	Strategic Outcome
Program Delivery	Ongoing	An independent and fair appeal process for disability pension, award and allowance decisions made by Veterans Affairs Canada

Description

Why is this a priority?

It ensures applicants have an avenue of redress by an independent tribunal for disability compensation and War Veterans Allowance applications.

What are the plans for meeting this priority?

- Provide timely, respectful hearings and fair, plain-language decisions to applicants.
- Issue written decisions within the service standard of six weeks following the hearing.

Priority	Type	Strategic Outcome
Improved Program Delivery	Ongoing	An independent and fair appeal process for disability pension, award and allowance decisions made by Veterans Affairs Canada

Description

Why is this a priority?

Enhancing program delivery through innovation and the use of technology improves the process for applicants.

What are the plans for meeting this priority?

- Work with representatives to expand hearing opportunities within the hearing calendar.
- Implement improvements and efficiencies identified in the Business Process Redesign of the Review and Appeal Hearing Process.

1. Type is defined as follows: previously committed to—committed to in the first or second fiscal year prior to the subject year of the report; ongoing—committed to at least three fiscal years prior to the subject year of the report; and new—newly committed to in the reporting year of the RPP or DPR.

Priority	Type	Strategic Outcome
Communication	Ongoing	An independent and fair appeal process for disability pension, award and allowance decisions made by Veterans Affairs Canada

Description

Why is this a priority?

It ensures applicants and all Canadians have information on the Board's mandate, program, and redress process, while meeting the increasing information needs of applicants.

What are the plans for meeting this priority?

- Work with Veterans organizations and stakeholders to identify new opportunities for outreach and information sharing.
- Develop new information resources for applicants and continue to publish useful materials and decisions on the website.

Priority	Type	Strategic Outcome
Accountable Management	Ongoing	An independent and fair appeal process for disability pension, award and allowance decisions made by Veterans Affairs Canada

Description

Why is this a priority?

It provides an effective program for applicants and their families by focussing on management, transparency and accountability.

What are the plans for meeting this priority?

- Continue to participate in audits and evaluations and strengthen management practices.
- Allocate resources to priorities and focus on internal processes to ensure efficient program delivery.

Risk Analysis

Key Risks

Risk	Risk Response Strategy	Link to Program Alignment Architecture
Fluctuating volume of applications makes it difficult to accurately forecast hearings	• Closely monitor applications • Develop a flexible hearing calendar in consultation with representative organizations to ensure applicants have options for timely hearings • Comprehensive monitoring and prioritizing of cases	An independent and fair appeal process for disability pension, award and allowance decisions made by Veterans Affairs Canada

Operating Environment

The Board's operating environment is influenced by the unpredictability of the nature and volume of applications it receives. The Board will focus on adding flexibility to the hearing calendar as it responds to continuing pressures to shorten the appeal process and provide plain language decisions to Veterans. The main factors affecting the Board's capacity to conduct hearings are the complexity of cases and the unpredictability of the time required by applicants and representatives to prepare their cases for hearings.

Program Delivery

The Board's priorities are to schedule timely hearings for applicants and to work with the representatives to expand hearing opportunities. The ongoing feedback from review hearing applicants will continue to guide improvements. The Board will continue to focus on issuing timely decisions that are fair and writing plain language decisions to help Veterans understand how their decisions were made.

Communication

The Board continues to focus on providing applicants with helpful information about the hearing process and on disseminating accurate information to stakeholders and Canadians about its work. The Board developed two important products in 2014-15 to achieve this priority: a video presentation for releasing CAF members; and an inaugural Annual Report[xiii]. In the coming year, the Board will build on these accomplishments through proactive communications and outreach with the CAF, RCMP and Veterans' organizations.

Accountable Management

The Board is strengthening its information management through compliance with the Government of Canada Directive on Recordkeeping. It will implement processes to more efficiently manage information and will participate in audits and a program evaluation. As experienced staff become eligible to retire, the Board will review its Integrated Business and Human Resources Plan to ensure it has optimal resources to carry out its work. The Board will

continue to integrate risk management into all areas of its work to ensure potential issues and strategies are identified to reduce possible impacts.

Planned Expenditures

Budgetary Financial Resources (dollars)

2015–16 Main Estimates	2015–16 Planned Spending	2016–17 Planned Spending	2017–18 Planned Spending
10,896,563	10,896,563	10,886,963	10,886,963

Human Resources (Full-Time Equivalents [FTEs])

2015–16	2016–17	2017–18
108	108	108

Budgetary Planning Summary for Strategic Outcome and Program (dollars)

Strategic Outcome, Program and Internal Services	2012–13 Expenditures	2013–14 Expenditures	2014–15 Forecast Spending	2015–16 Main Estimates	2015–16 Planned Spending	2016–17 Planned Spending	2017–18 Planned Spending
Strategic Outcome : An independent and fair appeal process for disability pension, award and allowance decisions made by Veterans Affairs Canada							
Review and Appeal	11,963,471	11,458,088	11,000,000	10,896,563	10,896,563	10,886,963	10,886,963
Subtotal	11,963,471	11,458,088	11,000,000	10,896,563	10,896,563	10,886,963	10,886,963
Internal Services Subtotal	Internal Services to support the operations of the Veterans Review and Appeal Board are provided under a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Veterans Affairs Canada. See Section II.						
Total	11,963,471	11,458,088	11,000,000	10,896,563	10,896,563	10,886,963	10,886,963

Over the planning period 2015-16 to 2017-18, the Board's planned spending is relatively unchanged. With continued efficiencies in its operations, the Board will continue to deliver excellent service to Veterans.

Alignment of Spending With the Whole-of-Government Framework

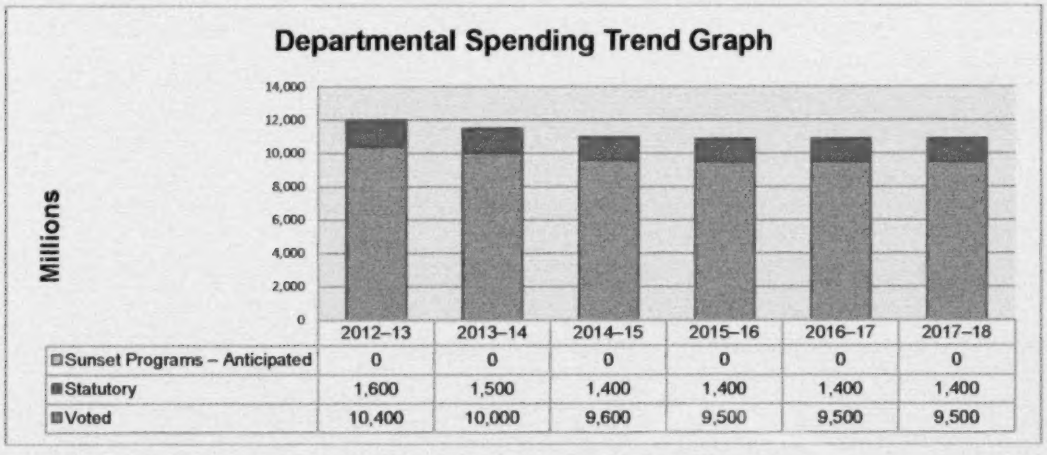
Alignment of 2015–16 Planned Spending With the Whole-of-Government Framework[xiv] (dollars)

Strategic Outcome	Program	Spending Area	Government of Canada Outcome	2015–16 Planned Spending
An independent and fair appeal process for disability pension, award and allowance decisions made by Veterans Affairs Canada	Review and Appeal	Economic Affairs	Income Security and Employment for Canadians	10,896,563

Total Spending by Spending Area (dollars)

Spending Area	Total Planned Spending
Economic affairs	10,896,563
Social affairs	
International affairs	
Government affairs	

Departmental Spending Trend



	2012–13	2013–14	2014–15	2015–16	2016–17	2017–18
Sunset Programs – Anticipated	0	0	0	0	0	0
Statutory	1,600	1,500	1,400	1,400	1,400	1,400
Voted	10,400	10,000	9,600	9,500	9,500	9,500

Planned spending in 2015-16 through 2017-18 is relatively unchanged due to the stable nature of the Board's operations.

Estimates by Vote

For information on the Veterans Review and Appeal Board's organizational appropriations, consult the 2015–16 Main Estimates[xv] on the Treasury Board of Canada Secretariat website.

Section II: Analysis of Program by Strategic Outcome

Strategic Outcome: An independent and fair appeal process for disability pension, award and allowance decisions made by Veterans Affairs Canada

Performance Measurement

Performance Indicators	Targets	Date to Be Achieved
Percentage of Board decisions overturned by the Federal Court	Less than 2% of Board decisions are overturned by the Federal Court	31 March 2016

Program: Review and Appeal

Description: The Veterans Review and Appeal Board's program delivers the independent review and appeal process for disability pension and disability award decisions made by Veterans Affairs Canada. It provides two levels of appeal for Veterans, Canadian Armed Forces members, Royal Canadian Mounted Police applicants, and their families who are dissatisfied with their disability pension and disability award decisions. The Board conducts hearings and issues written decisions. The Board's other key functions include hearing reviews and appeals of special award decisions made by Veterans Affairs Canada relating to attendance allowances, exceptional incapacity allowances and clothing allowances; hearing the final level of appeal for War Veterans Allowance decisions; and adjudicating compassionate award applications.

Budgetary Financial Resources (dollars)

2015–16 Main Estimates	2015–16 Planned Spending	2016–17 Planned Spending	2017–18 Planned Spending
10,896,563	10,896,563	10,886,963	10,886,963

Human Resources (Full-Time Equivalents [FTEs])

2015–16	2016–17	2017–18
108	108	108

Performance Measurement

Expected Results	Performance Indicators	Targets	Date to Be Achieved
Applicants are provided with a fair appeal process	Average score of cases measured against criteria for fair hearings and quality decisions on a 1-to-3 scale	2	31 March 2016
	Percentage of decisions issued within the published service standard	80%	31 March 2016

Planning Highlights

- Provide timely, respectful hearings and fair, plain-language decisions to applicants.
- Issue written decisions within the service standard of six weeks following the hearing.
- Work with representatives to expand hearing opportunities within the hearing calendar.
- Implement improvements and efficiencies identified in the Business Process Redesign of the Review and Appeal Hearing Process.
- Work with Veterans organizations and stakeholders to identify new opportunities for outreach and information sharing.
- Develop new information resources for applicants and continue to publish useful materials and decisions on the website.
- Continue to participate in audits and evaluations and strengthen management practices.
- Allocate resources to priorities and focus on internal processes to ensure efficient program delivery.

Internal Services

Description

Internal Services are groups of related activities and resources that are administered to support the needs of programs and other corporate obligations of an organization. Internal services include only those activities and resources that apply across an organization, and not those provided to a specific program. The groups of activities are Management and Oversight Services; Communications Services; Legal Services; Human Resources Management Services; Financial Management Services; Information Management Services; Information Technology Services; Real Property Services; Materiel Services; and Acquisition Services.

VAC provides some of these internal services to the Board under a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU). This service relationship has been in place since the Board was created in 1995 and continues to capitalize on the efficiencies presented by the Portfolio Department providing internal services to a small Portfolio member. The MOU is under review to ensure clarity in roles and responsibilities and to preserve the Board's independence.

Budgetary Financial Resources (dollars)

2015–16 Main Estimates	2015–16 Planned Spending	2016–17 Planned Spending	2017–18 Planned Spending
Internal Services to support the operations of the Veterans Review and Appeal Board are provided under a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Veterans Affairs Canada.			

Human Resources (FTEs)

2015–16	2016–17	2017–18
Internal Services to support the operations of the Veterans Review and Appeal Board are provided under a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) with Veterans Affairs Canada.		

Planning Highlights

- The Board will work within the MOU for Internal Services developed with Veterans Affairs Canada.

Section III: Supplementary Information

Future-Oriented Statement of Operations

The future-oriented condensed statement of operations provides a general overview of the Veterans Review and Appeal Board's operations. The forecast of financial information on expenses and revenues is prepared on an accrual accounting basis to strengthen accountability and to improve transparency and financial management.

Because the future-oriented condensed statement of operations is prepared on an accrual accounting basis, and the forecast and planned spending amounts presented in other sections of the Report on Plans and Priorities are prepared on an expenditure basis, amounts differ.

A more detailed future-oriented statement of operations and associated notes, including a reconciliation of the net cost of operations to the requested authorities, can be found on the Veterans Review and Appeal Board's website[xvi].

Future-Oriented Condensed Statement of Operations
For the Year Ended March 31, 2015
(dollars)

Financial Information	2014–15 Estimated Results	2015–16 Planned Results	Difference
Total expenses	12,342,581	12,298,563	(44,018)
Total revenues	0	0	0
Net cost of operations	12,342,581	12,298,563	(44,018)

The planned spending for Veterans Review and Appeal Board as reported on a modified-cash basis for 2015-16 is $10,896,563. This amount has been adjusted by estimated amounts for services provided without charge (i.e. accommodations, government payments to employee insurance plans, etc.), adjustment to severance pay liability and amortization of capital assets, to arrive at a future-oriented total expense of $12,298,563 for 2015-16.

Supplementary Information Tables

The supplementary information tables listed in the *2015–16 Report on Plans and Priorities* can be found on the Veterans Review and Appeal Board's website[xvii].

- Departmental Sustainable Development Strategy
- Upcoming Internal Audits and Evaluations Over the Next Three Fiscal Years

Tax Expenditures and Evaluations

The tax system can be used to achieve public policy objectives through the application of special measures such as low tax rates, exemptions, deductions, deferrals and credits. The Department of Finance Canada publishes cost estimates and projections for these measures annually in the *Tax Expenditures and Evaluations*[xviii] publication. The tax measures presented in the ***Tax Expenditures and Evaluations*** publication are the responsibility of the Minister of Finance.

Section IV: Organizational Contact Information

Veterans Review and Appeal Board

161 Grafton Street
PO Box 9900
Charlottetown, Prince Edward Island C1A 8V7
Canada

Website : http://www.vrab-tacra.gc.ca[xix]

Appendix: Definitions

appropriation: Any authority of Parliament to pay money out of the Consolidated Revenue Fund.

budgetary expenditures: Include operating and capital expenditures; transfer payments to other levels of government, organizations or individuals; and payments to Crown corporations.

Departmental Performance Report: Reports on an appropriated organization's actual accomplishments against the plans, priorities and expected results set out in the corresponding Reports on Plans and Priorities. These reports are tabled in Parliament in the fall.

full-time equivalent: Is a measure of the extent to which an employee represents a full person-year charge against a departmental budget. Full-time equivalents are calculated as a ratio of assigned hours of work to scheduled hours of work. Scheduled hours of work are set out in collective agreements.

Government of Canada outcomes: A set of 16 high-level objectives defined for the government as a whole, grouped in four spending areas: economic affairs, social affairs, international affairs and government affairs.

Management, Resources and Results Structure: A comprehensive framework that consists of an organization's inventory of programs, resources, results, performance indicators and governance information. Programs and results are depicted in their hierarchical relationship to each other and to the Strategic Outcome(s) to which they contribute. The Management, Resources and Results Structure is developed from the Program Alignment Architecture.

non-budgetary expenditures: Include net outlays and receipts related to loans, investments and advances, which change the composition of the financial assets of the Government of Canada.

performance: What an organization did with its resources to achieve its results, how well those results compare to what the organization intended to achieve and how well lessons learned have been identified.

performance indicator: A qualitative or quantitative means of measuring an output or outcome, with the intention of gauging the performance of an organization, program, policy or initiative respecting expected results.

performance reporting: The process of communicating evidence-based performance information. Performance reporting supports decision making, accountability and transparency.

planned spending: For Reports on Plans and Priorities (RPPs) and Departmental Performance Reports (DPRs), planned spending refers to those amounts that receive Treasury Board approval by February 1. Therefore, planned spending may include amounts incremental to planned expenditures presented in the Main Estimates.

A department is expected to be aware of the authorities that it has sought and received. The determination of planned spending is a departmental responsibility, and departments must be able to defend the expenditure and accrual numbers presented in their RPPs and DPRs.

plans: The articulation of strategic choices, which provides information on how an organization intends to achieve its priorities and associated results. Generally a plan will explain the logic behind the strategies chosen and tend to focus on actions that lead up to the expected result.

priorities: Plans or projects that an organization has chosen to focus and report on during the planning period. Priorities represent the things that are most important or what must be done first to support the achievement of the desired Strategic Outcome(s).

program: A group of related resource inputs and activities that are managed to meet specific needs and to achieve intended results and that are treated as a budgetary unit.

Program Alignment Architecture: A structured inventory of an organization's programs depicting the hierarchical relationship between programs and the Strategic Outcome(s) to which they contribute.

Report on Plans and Priorities: Provides information on the plans and expected performance of appropriated organizations over a three-year period. These reports are tabled in Parliament each spring.

results: An external consequence attributed, in part, to an organization, policy, program or initiative. Results are not within the control of a single organization, policy, program or initiative; instead they are within the area of the organization's influence.

Strategic Outcome: A long-term and enduring benefit to Canadians that is linked to the organization's mandate, vision and core functions.

sunset program: A time-limited program that does not have an ongoing funding and policy authority. When the program is set to expire, a decision must be made whether to continue the program. In the case of a renewal, the decision specifies the scope, funding level and duration.

target: A measurable performance or success level that an organization, program or initiative plans to achieve within a specified time period. Targets can be either quantitative or qualitative.

whole-of-government framework: Maps the financial contributions of federal organizations receiving appropriations by aligning their Programs to a set of 16 government-wide, high-level outcome areas, grouped under four spending areas.

Endnotes

[i] Veterans Review and Appeal Board Plans and Reports, http://www.vrab-tacra.gc.ca/Plans-eng.cfm.
[ii] *Veterans Review and Appeal Board Act*, http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/V-1.6/page-1.html.
[iii] *Veterans Review and Appeal Board Regulations,* http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/regulations/SOR-96-67/index.html.
[iv] *Pension Act*, http://laws.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/P-6/index.html.
[v] *Canadian Forces Members and Veterans Re-establishment and Compensation Act – Part 3,* http://laws.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/C-16.8/index.html.
[vi] *War Veterans Allowance Act*, http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/W-3/index.html.
[vii] *Royal Canadian Mounted Police Pension Continuation Act*, http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/R-10.6/index.html.
[viii] *Royal Canadian Mounted Police Superannuation Act*, http://laws-lois.justice.gc.ca/eng/acts/R-11/index.html.
[ix] About the Board, http://www.vrab-tacra.gc.ca/AbouttheBoard-AuSujetduTribunal-eng.cfm.
[x] Board Members, http://www.vrab-tacra.gc.ca/Chair-and-members-President-et-membres-eng.cfm.
[xi] Board's hearings, http://www.vrab-tacra.gc.ca/Overview-Apercu-eng.cfm.
[xii] Workload statistics, http://www.vrab-tacra.gc.ca/Facts/QuickFacts-faitsenbref-eng.cfm.
[xiii] Annual Report, http://www.vrab-tacra.gc.ca/Plans/2013-14-Annual-Report-Rapport-Annuel-eng.cfm.
[xiv] Whole-of-government framework, http://www.tbs-sct.gc.ca/ppg-cpr/frame-cadre-eng.aspx.
[xv] *2015–16 Main Estimates*, http://publiservice.tbs-sct.gc.ca/ems-sgd/esp-pbc/me-bpd-eng.asp.
[xvi] Veterans Review and Appeal Board website, http://www.vrab-tacra.gc.ca/Plans-eng.cfm.
[xvii] Veterans Review and Appeal Board website, http://www.vrab-tacra.gc.ca/Plans-eng.cfm.
[xviii] *Tax Expenditures and Evaluations* publication, http://www.fin.gc.ca/purl/taxexp-eng.asp.
[xix] Veterans Review and Appeal Board website, http://www.vrab-tacra.gc.ca/.